UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
11th meeting
held on
Friday, 23 October 1992
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. DINU (Romania)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 110: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 102: FINANCIAL REPORTS AND AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, AND REPORTS OF THE BOARD OF AUDITORS (continued)

OTHER MATTERS

This record is subject to correction.
Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, Room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

92-57198 6205S (E)

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/47/SR.11
11 November 1992
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

/...

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 110: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/47/7/Add.1, A/47/32, 287 and 336; A/C.5/47/1)

1. Mr. WIBISONO (Indonesia), referring to the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/47/32), said that his delegation noted with satisfaction that the utilization rate of conference services had exceeded the 75 per cent target in New York, Geneva and Vienna but it thought that additional efforts needed to be made so that all the organs of the system achieved that result. It supported the Committee's recommendations on the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1993, in particular the recommendation that the timing of the twenty-sixth session of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) should be changed to avoid overlapping with the World Conference on Human Rights. With regard to the improvement of the organization of work and effective use of conference resources, his delegation agreed with the Committee that it was necessary to develop further the system of global planning and coordination. The Secretariat reports on trends in meetings and documentation requirements should moreover be presented in a more consistent and comparable manner and include a sector-by-sector analysis.

2. Indonesia was in favour of the installation of a signalling system at headquarters locations and in the regional commissions, as outlined in document A/47/287, and thought that the portable system seemed to be the more desirable option. It supported the Committee's recommendations concerning the six-week rule for the issue of pre-session documents and requested that resolution 46/190 should be fully implemented.

3. Mr. FRANCIS (Australia) recalled that in paragraph 28 of resolution 46/190 the General Assembly had called upon the Committee on Conferences to continue to explore ways and means for a more effective application of the relevant recommendations contained in the report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations (Group of 18), as approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/213. But the Committee's mandate as set out in resolution 43/222 B did not allow it to control effectively the allocation and utilization of conference resources. It was hardly possible to expect any improvement in that regard until the Committee's mandate was expanded and strengthened. While the responsibility for redefining the mandate rested largely with Member States, it was nevertheless regrettable, as the United Kingdom delegation had pointed out, that the Committee's report did not respond to the request made in resolution 46/190. His delegation would like the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to clarify that point.

4. With regard to the calendar of conferences and meetings, the request contained in paragraph 3 of resolution 46/190 for the Committee on Conferences and the Secretariat to analyse alternative scheduling arrangements for the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council had not been

(Mr. Francis, Australia)

addressed. The views of the Chairman of the Committee on that point and on the implementation of the provisions concerning the utilization rate of conference services would be welcome. It also appeared that the calendar of conferences did not really take into account the Organization's priorities. For that reason his delegation believed that it would be instructive, as recommended at a recent seminar on budget methodology, for budget documents to show how conference-servicing costs were apportioned among the various substantive programmes.

5. With regard to the problems raised by the Secretary-General in his review of the Office of Conference Services (A/47/336), his delegation appreciated that there had been a significant additional demand for services and it repeated that the prior condition, if the aims were to increase the effectiveness of the Office, distribute meetings more evenly over the year and reduce the number of meetings convened or cancelled at short notice, was to strengthen the Committee on Conferences.

6. The late issue of documents, often involving the postponement of meetings, were a source of particular concern. The Office should try to assemble the list of documents for each meeting earlier and obtain the contributions of author departments quickly. It must also establish a clear order of priority for the translation of documents. His delegation would like the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services to respond to its comments.

7. Australia supported the proposal to install a signalling system to limit the length of statements but thought that the proposed systems were too costly. It was in favour of calculating a notional cost per hour of meeting time and making greater use of summaries of substantive Secretariat documents.

8. Mr. MERIFIELD (Canada) said that the title of agenda item 110 should be changed to read "Coordination and management of the United Nations conference and documentation facility" in order to describe more accurately the role of the Committee on Conferences. The Committee had a dual function: to present guidelines to the intergovernmental bodies on how to use the facility to the maximum benefit; and to help the Office of Conference Services to respond better to the needs of Member States. The Committee had fully carried out its mandate as stated in resolution 43/222, but it was now necessary to decide whether there was any further purpose in limiting its coordination role.

9. The Committee had recommended to the General Assembly that it should request all subsidiary bodies to seek the opinion of the Office concerning the availability of conference services before setting the dates of future sessions; his delegation thought that such a procedure should be obligatory. Much time was spent in seeking to perfect the methodology for measuring the use of conference services by intergovernmental bodies, but one thing was clear: many scheduled meetings were cancelled and conference facilities were persistently booked by bodies which did most of their work in informal

(Mr. Merifield, Canada)

consultations. The Committee on Conferences must be given sufficient authority to intervene in such cases. Similarly, it ought to have the power to reject documents which did not comply with the rules for the control of documentation.

10. His delegation was glad that the Committee on Conferences had itself examined the functioning of the Office of Conference Services. It thought that the Secretariat should encourage the adoption and use of new technologies, for they helped to increase efficiency, as the example of the Journal showed. Of course, staff members would be more productive if they were properly trained in the new techniques.

11. Finally, Canada thought that delegations tended to forget the cost of services. In that connection the proposal contained in the report on the prototype of a new budget format (A/C.5/47/3) for distributing common services on an indicative basis would help to instil discipline. It supported the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences and hoped to see its mandate strengthened.

12. Mrs. CESTAC (Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services), replying to the many questions and comments of delegations concerning conference services, said that it was true that the Secretary-General's report on the review of the Office of Conference Services did not contain any information about changes in staffing levels and workloads in the Office's various units over the past five years, but that was because the information already appeared in the proposed programme budgets for the last three bienniums and in the reports on the implementation of the programme budgets for the past two bienniums. However, in order to facilitate the Committee's work, the Office would reproduce the information in a working paper which would also show the impact of the freezing of a number of posts. To take for example the figures for the Translation Division: at 31 July 1992 the number of Professional posts was 18 per cent below the level approved in the programme budget for the biennium 1986-1987; the Division's output in 1991 had exceeded the 1990 level by 10.7 per cent, the 1989 level by 13.11 per cent, and the 1987 level by 9.4 per cent. The increases in output in the first half of 1992 over the first half of 1991, 1990, 1989 and 1988 were 8, 20.13, 19 and 25.3 per cent respectively.

13. As to the calculation of the cost per hour of meeting time which the Secretariat was to submit to the Committee on Conferences in 1993, it was clear that the choice of the elements to be used in calculating the indicative cost would require detailed analysis; the elements in question would be described in detail in the document to be put before the Committee on Conferences in 1993. However, she could already say that the indicative cost would be different from the expenditure estimates based on overall costs which appeared in statements of programme budget implications: such statements included only staff costs, whereas the indicative cost of an hour of meeting time would also take into account the costs of security services, electricity,

overheads, etc. As to the calculation of the cost per page of documentation, one document page of 330 words issued in six languages cost approximately $715 (which included the cost of translation, revision or self-revision, typing, reproduction and distribution) on the basis of the unit costs currently in force.

14. On the subject of publications, firstly it should be recalled that policy in that area was determined, on the basis of General Assembly guidelines, by the Publications Board and that a report on publications policy would be submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session. One representative had stated that projections indicated that publications sales over the current biennium would show a deficit of almost $1 million. Since the preparation of the proposed programme budget for 1992-1993, audited statements of income and expenditure relating to sales publications had been issued for the biennium 1990-1991 indicating that sales over the biennium had generated a net profit. A profit was now also forecast for the current biennium. The Advisory Committee referred to those results in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 (para. IS3.17).

15. One representative had questioned the utility of issuing certain publications with glossy covers. Such covers were usually limited to publications intended for sale, since they helped to make them more attractive and increase sales figures. Glossy covers were also stronger than ordinary covers, which was particularly useful in the case of frequently consulted reference works, such as the World Economic Survey. It was true that a certain number of sales publications were distributed free of charge, largely to Member States. Nevertheless, use of an ordinary cover for complimentary copies and of a glossy cover for sales copies would involve additional expense and increase production time. Moreover, the Secretariat's print shops were now equipped to produce glossy covers, which substantially reduced their cost. Publication circulation lists were regularly updated on the basis of replies to a questionnaire sent to the missions of Member States and the various Secretariat services. If the questionnaire was not returned or not properly completed, as sometimes happened, the details of the recipients of United Nations publications and the number of copies to be sent could not be updated.

16. With respect to the production and processing of documentation, the Office made every effort to respect the rule for documents submitted to it at least 10 weeks before the beginning of a session, but the primary concern in determining the order in which documents were processed was not to disrupt the work of intergovernmental and expert bodies. Processing priorities needed to be constantly reviewed so as to take account on the one hand of the absolute priority accorded documents of the Security Council and its subsidiary organs, the volume of which had increased almost tenfold over five years, and on the other hand of the need to respond on the fly to requests for documents of bodies that were in session, which often needed to be processed in less than

(Mrs. Cestac)

24 hours. In the final analysis, there could be no question of applying prescribed rules to the letter at the risk of paralysing the work of a particular organ. The fact remained that the Office's task would be facilitated by implementation of the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences that different organs should order their programmes of work to take account of the information contained in the reports on the status of documentation.

17. It had been suggested that the Office should formulate and implement new rules for the submission of documents by originating departments. But the Office already attempted as far as possible to ensure compliance with submission deadlines, regularly bringing the matter to the attention of departments. Without listing in detail the many causes of the late submission of documents, it was extremely rare for a delay to be attributable simply to some failing on the part of a particular individual. The Office was also actively engaged in ensuring compliance with the rules governing the length of documents, and, to that end, was cooperating with the editors in the secretariats of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council as well as with the secretariats of other organs.

18. Some delegations had suggested that the entitlements of certain organs to summary records of their meetings should be reviewed. The matter would be dealt with in the context of the detailed report to be submitted by the Secretariat to the Committee on Conferences at its 1993 substantive session, a report which would review the criteria and guidelines on which decisions establishing current entitlements to summary records for meetings of subsidary organs of the General Assembly had been based, and which would also contain an assessment of the validity of the guidelines.

19. The Russian delegation had expressed some concern regarding the quality of the documentation issued in Russian. It went without saying that the quality of translations, in all languages, was one of the Office's principal concerns. That was why translators were recruited on the basis of the results of an extremely selective international competitive examination. It must be recognized, however, that the increase in the volume of work of conference services, the diminished resources and the telescoping of priorities had an inevitable impact on the quality of output. The Office was doing its best to rectify the situation by improving its management and planning methods and by endeavouring to provide translators with more effective tools, including terminology databases and reference documents databases.

20. With regard to the impact of technological innovations on the productivity of conference services, an informal note for delegations indicated the savings that the introduction of certain technological innovations, including word processing and the Documents Recording, Information and Tracking System (DRITS), had occasioned. In that connection there were some striking statistics: since the introduction of word processing, which went back to 1980-1981, the volume of documentation to be

(Mrs. Cestac)

typed had declined by some 7 per cent whereas, over the same period, the permanent staff had declined by 23 per cent and temporary staffing needs had declined by 70 per cent. It should be noted that technological innovations did not always have their full impact immediately upon introduction. Thus, in the area of translation, the application of technological innovations was still not sufficiently widespread, owing to a lack of resources, to have a substantial impact on productivity.

21. Every request for appropriations submitted by the Office with a view to introducing technological innovations was accompanied by a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the innovations, reflecting an in-depth assessment prepared by the Office and then by the Budget Division and the Programme Planning and Budgeting Board, the results of the analysis ultimately being submitted to the Advisory Committee and then to the Fifth Committee.

22. The pace at which new technologies were introduced clearly depended on the resources available to the Office to acquire equipment and software, install networks and train staff. Since resources were limited, it was necessary to proceed in stages, which explained, for example, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General on the review of the Office, that the introduction of workstations had had to be carried out unequally. Moreover, innovations were not in any way limited to services at Headquarters. The United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) had played a leading role in the development and implementation of the optical disk system, and had been the first to install an integrated library system and a computerized documents sorting and distribution system. Moreover, UNOG was in no way behind Headquarters in terms of replacing WANG word-processing software by WordPerfect software. Furthermore, the DRITS system would soon be fully operational at Geneva. The installation of the system at Vienna was complicated by the fact that the United Nations and UNIDO shared responsibility for conference services. It was clear, regarding the installation of systems developed by the Secretariat, such as DRITS, that it was far more logical and less costly for the introductory phase to involve only one centre and to perfect the system before installing it elsewhere.

23. As to the choice of technologies, since the resources available for the period 1992-1993 were limited, it was planned to finish converting the text-processing pools to the use of WordPerfect software, which would require replacing minicomputers with a network of microcomputers, for which resources had been allocated in the budget for the current period. However, no resources had been allocated to provide translators with networked workstations, which accordingly would be done at a later stage, following a pilot study to evaluate equipment and software features and carry out a cost-benefit analysis of such a project. As to the use of videoconferencing, the report on the review of the Office clearly stated that the option now easily could be reconsidered in the light of recent advances in the technology.

(Mrs. Cestac)

24. Several delegations had emphasized the need to distribute meetings more uniformly throughout the year and to ensure that peak periods did not occur simultaneously at the three major conference centres. Those issues involved two key aspects of planning: the organization of the calendar of conferences and the organization of the programme of work of the various bodies. Guided by General Assembly resolutions which called for meetings, the Office prepared a draft calendar in close cooperation with the secretariats of the bodies concerned and endeavoured to distribute the meetings as uniformly as possible bearing in mind, on the one hand, the various requirements resulting from the resolutions and, on the other hand, the Secretariat's ability to process the required documentation. It obviously was up to each body to organize its own work. However, the Office reminded the secretariats of the various bodies of the existing directives and advised them on how to make optimum use of the resources allocated for conference servicing. In that regard, the implementation of the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences calling on intergovernmental bodies to seek the technical advice of the Office before making recommendations or taking decisions on the dates of their sessions would substantially facilitate the work of the Office.

25. With respect to the elaboration of uniform production standards for all organizations in the United Nations system, a draft report on the matter recently had been submitted to the Organizational Committee of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). Once the Committee had provided its comments, the final version of the report would be prepared with the assistance of the Budget Division and would be submitted to the Fifth Committee through the Advisory Committee.

26. As to the respective roles of ACC, the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) and the Inter-Agency Meetings on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP) with respect to the coordination of conference services, CCAQ had not decided at its substantive session in 1991 that it could expand its activities to cover conference servicing. Although CCAQ had pointed out that it was important not to institute an arrangement for the consideration of technical issues that would duplicate the work of the Inter-Agency Meetings, it had indicated its willingness to consider those matters which the Inter-Agency Meetings decided should be referred to it. ACC, for its part, considered the conclusions and recommendations of the Inter-Agency Meetings whenever a General Assembly resolution so provided.

27. Turning next to the questions raised concerning the report of the Secretary-General on the review of the Office, she pointed out that several of the measures adopted by the Secretariat and described, for example, in section III of the report, were intended to resolve the problems to which the United States representative had referred. The report also clearly stated (para. 36) that other recommended measures could not be implemented within the resources allocated for 1992-1993. Details on those measures relating,

inter alia, to the provision of workstations to all translators, the establishment of DRITS subsystems and the establishment at Headquarters of an automated document sorting, packaging and distribution system, were not included in that report. A cost-benefit analysis of their implementation would be carried out in connection with the preparation of the proposed programme budget for 1994-1995.

28. A number of recommendations concerning publications which had been made following the review of the Office also were not included in the report of the Secretary-General: they would be incorporated in the report to be submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session on the review of the overall publications policy of the Organization.

29. She wished to point out that the Management Advisory Service had participated very actively and directly in all stages of the review of the Office of Conference Services, including the elaboration of conclusions and recomendations. Those conclusions and recommendations had served as the basis for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General, a report which, it should be underscored, contained the principal recommendations which the Office was in a position to implement on the basis of its mandate and given its current financial resources, as well as all the recommendations requiring decisions by Member States.

30. She welcomed the importance which delegations attached to compliance with the rules concerning delays in the issuance of pre-session documentation, the implementation of resolutions on the control and limitation of documentation and compliance with directives concerning the utilization of meetings services. She also noted with satisfaction that the Training Service of the Office of Human Resources Management had introduced a training programme on drafting for staff responsible for preparing documents and reports. Lastly, she emphasized that the Office of Conference Services comprised highly integrated elements and that effective management of the Office required a global approach and centralized planning, which fully justified the strengthening of the administration of the Office, as one representative had suggested.

31. In conclusion, she said that the observations made during the general debate showed the interest which delegations attached to the activities of the Office and demonstrated that the Committee fully recognized that conference services were a necessity, whether or not they were deemed a priority.

32. Mr. KARBUCZKY (Chairman of the Committee on Conferences) welcomed the interest the Committee had shown in all matters relating to conference services as well as the general support expressed for the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences. The fact remained that attendance had been relatively low at the Committee's substantive session in August. It would be helpful - and more constructive - if the members of the Committee on Conferences would take advantage of deliberations in that Committee itself to resolve some of the issues, rather than voice criticism in the Fifth Committee.

(Mr. Karbuczky)

33. A number of speakers had referred to the first three recommendations of the Group of 18 and had suggested that the Committee on Conferences should evaluate its work in the light of those recommendations. However, it was only recommendation 1 which dealt exclusively with the Committee on Conferences. It stated that the Committee should be strengthened and given broader responsibilities. He personally endorsed that recommendation. However, the deliberations on the matter in the Fifth Committee had led to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 43/222 B, which incorporated most of the specific tasks envisaged in the recommendations of the Group of 18 but did not give the Committee the authority to override decisions of intergovernmental organs. The Committee currently was not mandated to judge the substantive work of intergovernmental and expert bodies. Its task was to provide them with the required resources; to do so it depended on quantitative rather than qualitative assessments of such things as the rate of utilization of conference services. However, it could not on its own increase or decrease the resource entitlements of subsidiary organs. The current task of the Committee was to make appropriate recommendations to the Fifth Committee, which in turn took the action deemed necessary. It was up to delegations to decide if they were satisfied with that process.

34. The Committee was engaged in activities which clearly illustrated the progress achieved in the implementation of its present term of reference. Thus, at the three informal meetings held during 1992 it had monitored the Secretariat's work on the review of the Office of Conference Services, the notional cost of meeting time and the two indices on availability of pre-session documentation. The Committee also intended to intervene more directly in the work of subsidiary organs and to provide clear directives to the Secretariat. In particular, it would recommend that relevant costing information should be brought to the attention of members of all organs at the beginning of sessions, and had invited the Secretariat to incorporate existing rules and guidelines into training programmes and to provide more analytical assessments of trends in meeting and documentation requirements. It had also recommended that the Assembly should request intergovernmental organs to improve the planning of informal consultations and to seek the technical advice of the Office of Conference Services before deciding to make adjustments in scheduled sessional dates.

35. A number of speakers had expressed the view that the Committee should play a standard-setting role. The fact that it was already moving in that direction was demonstrated by its recommendations concerning the development of a model format for reports of subsidiary organs, the presentation of workload statistics including sector-by-sector analyses, and the study on criteria for determining which subsidiary organs should be entitled to receive written meeting records.

36. It had been decided that the analytical paper referred to in paragraphs 11 and 12 of resolution 46/190 would be presented to the General Assembly at it forty-eighth session. At the same time, the Committee had

(Mr. Karbuczky)

begun to review, on a preliminary basis, information provided by subsidiary bodies which had embarked upon the consultations called for in the resolution. The initial reading of that information had prompted the recommendation to subsidiary organs regarding the scheduling of informal consultations.

37. With regard to the proposal to raise the benchmark figure for the rate of utilization of conference-servicing resources, the Committee intended to review that indicator as well as others included in the various reports on meeting statistics when it came to consider the overall question of methodology after the completion of the three-year experimental period which had begun in 1990 and when all the necessary information had been received from the intergovernmental bodies concerned.

38. In connection with scheduling arrangements for the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, the Committee had examined all the factors involved, including the reporting obligations of subsidiary organs, the Secretariat's capacity to provide conference services, the relevant rules of the Assembly and the Council, etc., and had concluded that the established schedule should be maintained. On the other hand, the twenty-sixth session of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law had been rescheduled to 5-23 July 1993 to avoid any overlap with the World Conference on Human Rights.

39. As the previous Chairman of the Committee on Conferences had explained, the Committee did not seek to limit access of subsidiary organs to conference services; rather, it assessed the feasibility of accommodating requests as well as the factors that had contributed or could contribute to the need to seek exceptions. Those who suggested that the Committee merely rubber-stamped requests should not forget that the Committee's responsibility was to utilize its technical expertise to manage the meetings and documentation programme while fully respecting the mandates of subsidiary bodies.

40. He was informed that the Secretariat would present a statement of programme budget implications of installing a signalling system for enforcing time-limits established in accordance with the rules of procedure. Pending the submission of that report, the Committee on Conferences had preferred not to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the various options.

41. Lastly, regarding the change in schedule of the substantive session for 1993, the decision to meet in late March and early April had been taken in consultation with the Secretariat, which had given assurances that the change would not disrupt the meetings programme envisaged for that period.

42. Mrs. CLIFF (United Kingdom) hoped that the conference room paper which the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services was to submit on the subject of staffing and workload developments in various branches of the Office of Conference Services would indicate clearly and separately those meetings which received conference servicing when available and those serviced by the permanent staff of the Office of Conference Services.

43. Mr. MAQTARI (Yemen) noted that the Secretariat had not answered the questions he had raised in connection with the use of Arabic. He wished to know why the opening statements of the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services and of the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences had been distributed in two langauges only.

44. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) said that his delegation would wish to see the report of the Management Advisory Service which had served as a basis for the review of the Office of Conference Services . He would also like to receive the information requested at the forty-fifth session concerning productivity standards applicable to conference services personnel and steps taken to improve productivity.

45. Mrs. CESTAC (Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services), replying to the representative of Yemen, said that she made no distinction between languages. The question raised by the representative of Yemen involved the problem of the recruitment freeze. Recruitment being suspended at present, it had not been possible to fill all permanent posts. Once the freeze was lifted, the Secretariat would be able once more to organize international recruitment competitions. The reason why her opening remarks and those of the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences had not been translated into all the official languages was that they were unofficial documents. The other documents to be circulated to delegations, in particular those relating to statistics, would be conference room documents distributed in the six official languages.

46. Mr. MURUYAMA (Japan) thought that the question of the rate of utilization of conference services was a false problem if, as had been the case hitherto, the measure applied was the share of resources allocated to an organ which had actually been utilized. What should be measured was the rate of utilization of Secretariat capacity, including both servicing of meetings and documentation. Such statistics had never been furnished either to the Fifth Committee or to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. Associating himself with the request made by the United Kingdom delegation, he said that any omission could be made good by supplying additional information.

47. Mr. MAQTARI (Yemen) said that the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services had not answered all the questions raised by his delegation. In paragraph 58 (b) of document A/47/32, Member States were requested to exercise restraint in requesting documentation and in the submission of their reports. However, States had a right to submit or request all the documents they deemed necessary. It should further be noted that in the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1993 appearing in document A/47/32 the emphasis was placed on servicing in four languages, namely, English, French, Spanish and Russian. Arabic and Chinese were still not mentioned.

48. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America), reiterating his earlier request, asked the Secretariat to confirm that the information and report he mentioned would be communicated to delegations for the informal consultations. With regard to the reply given to the representative of Yemen on the subject of language services, his delegation believed that a number of exceptions had been made to the recruitment freeze. He would wish to know whether those exceptions also applied to the Office of Conference Services. Furthermore, he understood that the recruitment freeze did not apply to temporary staff. Since a substantial part of the budget of the Office of Conference Services was earmarked for temporary staff, it ought to have been possible to recruit Arabic translators.

49. Mr. AHMED (Iraq) fully endorsed the remarks made by the representative of Yemen. He wanted to know whether the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services had been speaking in her personal capacity or on behalf of the Administration when she had said that she made no distinction between the six official languages. With regard to the report of the Committee on Conferences, as a member of that Committee his delegation had been obliged to join the consensus even though it did not agree with certain paragraphs of the report. He quite understood the restrictions placed on the conference services provided to certain bodies, such as a small group of experts consisting of five members and using only two languages, but wondered whether meeting records were still produced in the six official languages in the case of meetings where interpretation services were provided in only three official languages.

50. Mr. SPAANS (Netherlands) pointed out that it was not the General Assembly which had taken the decision to freeze recruitment, but the Secretary-General in his capacity as head of the Administration. He therefore saw no reason why the information on the subject requested by the representative of the United States could not be provided informally.

51. Mrs. CESTAC (Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services), replying to the questions raised by the representatives of Yemen and Iraq, said that the language to which a body was entitled was determined by the resolutions establishing it. The principle of parity between languages applied to the services to which the body was entitled for a given meeting. Furthermore, for bodies where a distinction was drawn between working languages and official languages, it might be that the number of languages in which interpretation was provided was greater than the number of languages in which the summary records or minutes were drawn up. The information on languages appearing in the calendar of meetings was intended as a guide for a given period, and reflected the composition of the bodies during the period concerned. She also pointed out that she was not addressing the Committee in her personal capacity, but on behalf of the Secretary-General.

52. Mr. BAUDOT (Acting Controller) said that the Management Advisory Service was a service like any other and, in his view, it had been wrong to mention it by name in a resolution. Its contribution to the report of the Secretary-General had been in the form of a document which had not been published officially. If Member States really wanted to know the content of

(Mr. Baudot)

the document, it could be circulated to them in the form of a working document or an information supplement. With regard to the recruitment freeze, the representative of the United States was quite right in saying that it had no effect on the recruitment of temporary staff.

AGENDA ITEM 102: FINANCIAL REPORTS AND AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, AND REPORTS OF THE BOARD OF AUDITORS (continued) (A/47/5 and Corr.1, vols. I, II and III, and Add.1-3, Add.4 and Corr.1, Add.5-7 and Add.8 and Corr.1, A/47/315, 460, 500 and 510)

53. Mr. MARUYAMA (Japan) said that the findings of the audits conducted by the Board of Auditors were alarming with regard both to financial aspects and management. Little had been done to end the irregularities which had persisted for many years and the number of officials dismissed for fraud seemed to be growing.

54. He deplored the fact that the Board's recommendations had not been systematically applied. At a time when the Organization's role on the international stage was growing, particularly in the field of peace-keeping, full financial accountability for the utilization of resources was essential in order to retain the confidence of Member States. The Administration should immediately investigate the anomalies revealed in the Board's reports and, on the basis of its findings, propose corrective measures. He supported the proposal made by the representative of the United States that an expanded audit of the accounts should be undertaken for the financial year 1990-1991.

55. He also considered that an institutional mechanism should be introduced as a matter of urgency to prevent and punish fraud by means of stricter disciplinary measures and legal action. In that connection, it was important to enhance interaction between the Board, the Administration and Member States. He welcomed the development of a plan of action at UNDP which included deadlines for following up the Board's recommendations. ACABQ also had a crucial role to play and should propose measures to the General Assembly aimed at ensuring implementation of those recommendations. Where appropriate, it should also be given access to the findings of the internal auditors and the Board's management letters. The Secretary-General's proposal to establish an inspector-general's post should be discussed in due course.

56. He was concerned that the problem of insufficient audit evidence regarding expenditure committed by executing agencies still persisted in UNDP and UNFPA, which had again prevented the Board from issuing an unqualified audit opinion. It was particularly regrettable since the reporting cycle for audits had been biennialized in 1989 specifically in order to allow those organizations to obtain timely audited statements. Since it appeared that the biennialization of the reporting cycle had led to a relaxation of financial and budgetary control, his delegation proposed that the procedure should be suspended to enable the General Assembly to consider the findings of the proposed expanded audit of the 1990-1991 accounts at its next session.

57. Mr. NIWA (Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Finance and Administration, United Nations Development Programme) said that UNDP took the recommendations of the Board of Auditors and the Advisory Committee very seriously and had initiated a number of important initiatives with the approval of the Governing Council to improve management, with a constant concern for cost-effectiveness. Corrective action in response to comments raised by the auditors was taken immediately following the reporting of those comments to UNDP. Progress had already been achieved in some areas.

58. In line with the measures taken by the United Nations (A/47/510), UNDP had issued a circular in April 1992 establishing a mechanism for confidential notification by staff members of any case of fraud or presumptive fraud involving the improper use of funds. Also, internal controls had been enhanced through the establishment of an ad hoc committee to review cases of possible abuse, on whose recommendation corrective action had already been taken.

59. Regarding the 16 cases of fraud or presumptive fraud mentioned by the Board of Auditors, UNDP itself had detected them and had taken steps to deal with them, including disciplinary action and legal action to recover the misappropriated funds. The control mechanisms did, therefore, work, and the charge of laxity was not justified.

60. The UNDP Administrator had been congratulated by the Governing Council for his budget strategies for the bienniums 1992-1993 and 1994-1995; they had already resulted in cost savings, notably through constraints on administrative expenditures, and would result in further cost reductions in the future, thus responding positively to the concern expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 70 of its report (A/47/500). In paragraph 98 of its report, ACABQ had recommended improvements in the project appraisal and approval procedure in the regional bureaux, which had in fact been streamlined and decentralized.

61. UNDP could not solve by itself the problem of tardy receipt of audit statements and certificates from executing agencies, but, as noted by the auditors, it was important to stress that, except for minor adjustments, the audited statements agreed with the unaudited ones. UNDP had made considerable efforts to establish audit guidelines for nationally executed projects. While audit certificates were not all received prior to the closing of UNDP accounts, most audit reports were received. The change in the regulations requiring each project to be audited at least once, and major projects at least biennially, should alleviate the problem to some extent. That notwithstanding, UNDP was continuing its efforts to ensure timely reporting.

62. Some UNDP staff had participated in a working group on accounting standards and principles and the draft report of that working group had been reviewed by members of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions in September 1992, but had not been found acceptable; the revised draft was expected to be presented to the Joint Panel of External Auditors.

(Mr. Niwa)

63. As promised (A/47/5/Add.1, para. 148), revised guidelines on the rules and procedures governing contracting of consultants would be issued by the end of the year to all units concerned. With regard to the need for more adequate contractual devices, UNDP had already commenced to design the new contractual arrangement and had begun consultations with the International Civil Service Commission.

64. Special leave with full pay was granted in only a limited number of cases, when clearly justifiable and in the full interest of UNDP, in connection with agreed terminations of staff. It was correct that the process had sometimes not been properly documented, but management had put in place in 1992 a procedure to handle each such case. Strict procedures had been implemented to avoid ex post facto requests for consultant contracts.

65. UNDP recognized the problems concerning property and inventory management and was conducting a review of the relevant procedures and guidelines; it expected to be in a position to improve them soon, in particular with regard to delegation of authority and responsibility.

66. Following the recommendations made by the Board of Auditors, UNDP had taken immediate action to modify its financial regulations and rules on internal audit. Remedial measures had been taken to respond to concerns that audit coverage had been less than desired, and a pilot scheme involving a regional service centre was being established to expand audit coverage of field operations. With respect to the need for keeping audit and operational functions strictly separate, a review was under way and should confirm that those functions did not involve any conflict of interest.

67. The list of areas in which UNDP had taken corrective action would be too long to go through in detail, but the examples given demonstrated the progress that had been made and the Programme's determination to continue in the same vein.

OTHER MATTERS

68. Mr. SPAANS (Netherlands) asked the Acting Controller why the only agenda item indicated on the front of the report of the Secretary-General concerning the request to the United Nations to observe the referendum process in Eritrea (A/47/544) was agenda item 97 (b). He would like to know by what means the matter would be brought before the Fifth Committee.

69. Mr. BAUDOT (Acting Controller) said that the Fifth Committee's role would be to review the statement of financial implications drawn up by the Secretariat once the Third Committee had taken a decision.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.